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The Musket

LEXINGTON HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT-RUN NEWSPAPER SINCE 1969

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Volume LXIV Issue IV—April 2022

Tail-Wagon Tuesdays: LHS Welcomes New Therapy Dog

Staff photo by Olivia Hoover
Flynn the therapy dog

■ Jahnavi Bolleddula
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Staff Writers

Beginning Feb. 1, Flynn, the therapy dog, and her handler Mickey began visiting Lexington High School's campus during second and third block every Tuesday. Coined Tail-Wagon Tuesdays, the program aims to bring joy to students and faculty.

Flynn often spends the first block in the Rock Room, where she spends time with students who plan to meet her in advance. During the second block, Flynn follows a schedule walking around campus, giving more students and faculty opportunities to meet her.

"The best way to find her is to keep your eyes peeled and see if you can run into her as she travels between locations, or hearing where she might be because we've also determined through this process that flexibility is key," James Farnham, a social worker and coordinator of this program, said.

Students have met Flynn during classes and passing time. Overall, the program has received a positive response, and members of the LHS community have found this initiative exciting and wholesome.

"It seemed that people were comforted by seeing a dog, and it's just a new experience… It's also something people look forward to on Tuesday to see Flynn," Kaavya Moogala, a freshman, said.

Kerrie Donnely, a social worker at Harrington, first introduced the program to Lexington Public Schools. During a meeting with the district's counselors and social workers, Donnelly discussed how the therapy dog had been visiting Harrington.

"It piqued the interest of both Mr. Farnham and I, so we reached out to her to get an understanding of how it all happened at their school. That prompted communications with the head of nursing, the superintendent, and principal to see if it was something that we could do at the high school," Stephanie Michael, a counselor and coordinator of this program, said.

Through the organization Dog B.O.N.E.S, Michael and Farnham found Mickey, Flynn's owner. Now, faculty and staff called "Puppy Pals" volunteer to escort Flynn and Mickey around the LHS campus.

As Flynn is making more visits to the school, members of the LHS community have noticed that her presence has brought positive energy to the school environment every Tuesday.

"I have seen the visible happiness that she brings when she is here through all the different types of students that we have on campus. What we hoped it would do is actually falling into place, and we hope it will continue to do that," Michael said.

After a successful pilot year, Farnham and Michael plan to continue improving the program by incorporating student feedback.

"I think students should be able to meet Flynn before and after school, and if they have free blocks in the school day because I've talked to some students who really only get to see Flynn once," Elaina Li, a freshman, said.

Many students and staff believe that this initiative will benefit other LPS schools. However, coordinators of the program also acknowledged the careful planning required to expand the initiative.

"It has to be done so with responsibility and taking into account potentially students who may have fears of dogs and not like dogs, or have allergies to dogs, because not everyone is a dog person as much as they're loved. So, it should be done in moderation, but I think it can be a very interesting touch to school life," Li said.

Standing in Solidarity: Ukraine Bake Sale Fundraiser

■ Ellen Wang
Sports Editor

On March 15, Lexington High School students and staff expressed their solidarity with Ukraine through an after-school bake sale. This event intended to raise awareness and help provide aid for the Ukrainian people, amassing hundreds of student and teacher supporters alike.

The recent Russian military invasion of Ukraine has had profound effects on the Ukrainian people. Millions have been forced to leave their homes as the bombing and shelling of civilian homes and public infrastructure continues to escalate.

"Everyday I'm calling [my extended family], and they say the towns around them have been bombed. I never know if the next time I call them I'll be able to reach them. Everyday you're calling and asking if everyone is alive," Andriy Barchuk, a Chemistry teacher from Ukraine who was involved in the bake sale, said.

During this time of uncertainty, a group of LHS students and staff came together to lead relief efforts for Ukraine through a bake sale.

"My family is from Ukraine, so after the war started, I went back to school and wanted to do something to help. My teachers told me to go to a meeting with Dean Caniff and Mr. Baker, so I went to this meeting, and I met other Ukrainian students and staff, like Dr. Barchuk. There, we decided we wanted to run a bake sale," Veronika Moroz, a sophomore and student leader of the fundraiser, said.

This group of students worked collaboratively to spread the word to classmates and staff members in preparation for the bake sale.

"Two or three days before the bake sale, my friend, Ada Jones, and I made flyers together, and we sent them out to our teachers the day before the bake sale, posted them on Instagram, and got the word out. Also, my friends came over to my house the day before the bake sale, and we made Ukrainian cookies together and brought them to the bake sale," Moroz said.

The bake sale helped raise $1400, which was distributed among charities focused on purchasing first aid supplies for children impacted by the war. Notably, a significant factor of the bake sale's success came from donations from the LHS community.

"People were really generous. A lot of people came in and bought a $3 donut for like $10 and not asking for change; that's what a lot of people did. A lot of people were not just buying baked goods from a bake sale, but making a donation for the cause," Andy Baker, the Associate Principal at LHS who was involved in the bake sale, said.

After reflecting on the positive outcomes of the bake sale, participants felt that the event allowed them to support those in need.

"The turnout was really cool, and it was cool to see the contribution of so many amazing people. I'd like to think that in some way we helped people feel like they were helping. For me, when I saw what was going on in Ukraine, I felt really helpless and it's very scary, so by doing a little bit, at least we were doing something," Moroz said.

For others, the bake sale reminded them of the larger ideals that supporting Ukraine represented.

"I would say for the Lexington community, it shows tremendous support to the Ukrainian people. It's not just a war in Ukraine; it's a war between freedom and autocracy. These are the core values of the United States. Freedom and democracy is what the United States was built on," Barchuk said.

Many hope that the LHS community will continue to remember and stand in solidarity with Ukraine.

"I just want solidarity for Ukraine to stay in people's minds and people in Lexington to keep thinking about the people in Ukraine. I want the people in Lexington to remember the people that are suffering there and do what we can help," Moroz said.

LHS Program of Studies Adds Asian and African History Electives

■ Jessica Liu
Seiya Saneyoshi
Staff Writers

Starting in the upcoming school year, Lexington High School students will have the opportunity to take two new Social Studies elective courses: Asian American History and African American History. The new courses are part of an initiative to celebrate the diverse heritages of the Lexington community.

Kerry Dunne, the Chair of the Social Studies Department at LHS, is leading the effort to develop these new electives that enable students to explore different ethnic studies.

"There's a lot of really good research that shows a student who takes even one ethnic studies course does better in their overall outcomes in high school," Dunne said.

The electives were developed with input from students who attended I Block sessions with Dunne in December. During these sessions, Dunne shared resources with students and gathered ideas from them.

Min Feldman, a senior who helped develop the courses, felt the history classes currently offered at LHS didn't reflect the diversity of the student body.

"Considering that we're actually the town with a lot of minorities and Asian-Americans, and African-American makeup...I feel like [the curriculum] doesn't really accurately represent the student population to not have those kinds of classes, especially when you have a plethora of classes solely focused on American history and solely focused on British literature, American literature, etc," Feldman said.

In the meeting with Dunne, students emphasized the importance of teaching not only the struggles of African Americans but also their success and accomplishments.

"African Americans have been disparaged for centuries. While that is true, I think that kind of omits all of the accomplishments. And I think... in the class [we should] make an emphasis to highlight those accomplishments and highlight the beautiful works of literature," Ahmed Akoad, a senior who helped develop the curriculum, said.

There are currently 40 students signed up to take Asian American History and 42 students signed up to take African American History. However, teachers for these courses haven't been selected yet.

"This was like a dream come true for me because... this is gonna be a heavy lift for whatever teacher is teaching these for the first time. So what I want more than anything else is that we not just get enough kids to run one section, but run two, so that way they can play it and teach it, and it's gonna be a really tough fall semester for them. But then they can repeat it in the spring semester and fine-tune it to change things that didn't work so well," Dunne said.

Despite the challenges of creating the new history electives, students believe the courses will bring positive change to LHS.

"Now that we actually have a specific class designed to teach students about these important races that live in America, I think it's a big step forward for not only Lexington, but for public schools all across Massachusetts," Nathanael Esperance, a senior, said.

SADD Club Returns to In-Person Peer Prevention

■ Tara Pai
Sapphire Wang
Staff Writers

On March 15, Lexington High School's Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) Club resumed its in-person peer prevention program for the first time since the pandemic began. Beginning with Harrington Elementary School, the club sent its high school leaders to 5th-grade classrooms across the district to teach lessons on health and safety.

The SADD Club is partnered with the PE Health and Wellness department and focuses on informing young students on how to make smart decisions regarding their mental and physical health. As part of the program, trained high school student volunteers, called Peer Educators, visit the local elementary and middle schools to lead and facilitate lessons on topics such as drug and alcohol usage, vaping, and peer pressure.

"There are some kids that just do the SADD club events and the bigger events like that, and there are some students who just do coming into the elementary and middle schools with me, but most kids I would say sort of do a mix of both," Kristie Demirev, a clinical social worker and leader of the SADD Club, said.

Due to the pandemic, the peer prevention program was held remotely during the 2020-2021 school year. During these meetings, Peer Educators would virtually meet with student cohorts.

"I would do some teaching initially then put [the elementary school students] in breakout rooms led by the high school students," Demirev said. "Everyone agrees that it's much better in person. The 5th graders are a lot more talkative when you're in person versus over Zoom, and they're in a class with everyone."

With the transition out of remote meetings, Joy Yuan, a freshman and member of the prevention program, had a positive experience at the start of this year's in-person prevention trips.

"I enjoyed it. I feel like it was fun talking to the 5th graders. They were very enthusiastic about it the entire time," Yuan said.

Because of the program's late start, the schedule differs from the schedule in pre-pandemic years.

"Because of the way the pandemic sort of played out this year, we can't do 6th grade this year because we weren't allowed to do the field trips in the fall, and by the time we sort of got approval there's just no capacity to do both 5th and 6th at this point, unfortunately," Demirev said.

Despite the scheduling conflicts, the recent return to in-person prevention for 5th graders has been going well, especially since high school volunteers can now interact with students face-to-face.

"Since we're talking to like 5th graders, you know, you gotta do hands-on activities. I found that they only listen when you're actually doing games," Yuan said.

Yuan appreciates the opportunity the 5th graders are given to learn about these critical topics with the help of the high schoolers.

"I'm very happy the school decided to teach this to kids at a very young age. I wasn't taught this back in 5th grade. I had to learn it through the internet," Yuan said.

Similarly, Demirev encourages the spread of the SADD Club, hoping that other districts may adopt the program to help the younger generation gain access to the information they need.

LHS Adjusts the Block Schedule

■ Audi Lin
Devangi Rathi
Staff Writers

On April 5, Lexington High School switched to a new schedule developed by the Lexington Education Association (LEA). Following a similar format to pre-pandemic schedules, the new schedule even outs the block lengths, reduces the current four lunches to three, adds an I Block, and brings back an Advisory period.

Given the ongoing pandemic, some students have voiced concerns about the changes to the lunch schedule.

"I think that the lunch periods decreasing from four to three was... not a great move because right now we are already having issues with space, especially with the fact that the pandemic is still happening and we are already struggling to be socially distant during lunch," Anjali Agarwal, a junior, said.

However, the LEA is planning on addressing these issues to ensure adequate space for students during lunch.

"As you may have seen in Commons II, we put the long tables back because those distance restrictions are now over, in that sense. And so, we're going to be putting long tables back in Commons I," Andrew Stephens, principal of LHS, said.

The current schedule includes two 40-minute I Blocks where students can meet with teachers for extra help and catch up on school work. The new schedule will include an additional I Block during Day 5.

Some students believe this addition could potentially give them some much needed free time.

"There's not enough time in the day for a lot of LHS students to just get their work done or even just to regroup,"Agarwal said.

However, others do not like being confined to a classroom during I Block.

"I Blocks are essentially just a free, except you're forced to go somewhere. I would have thought that for upperclassmen, they should have just replaced it with a free," Nathaniel Cheung, a junior, said.

The addition of Advisory is the last significant change to the LHS schedule. Time will be allotted before Day 2 lunch blocks for students to meet with their Advisory groups. With the previous format for Advisory sparking controversy, the LEA hopes that the new structure will be beneficial to students and teachers alike.

"A lot of times when you're wanting to have a conversation, there's a power dynamic because you're having a conversation with a person who also gives you grades. This is a way of organizing kids in a way that doesn't have that type of skin in the game. It's another layer where kids might have another adult that they're connecting with that works for them," Stephens said.

The return to Advisory has also evoked mixed sentiments. While some students believe that Advisory may not be very beneficial, others appreciate the extra support.

"Personally, I was not a big fan of Advisory when it was first introduced to the schedule as a way of sort of maybe trying to facilitate discussion. However, I like the fact that it will help us sign up for I Block for the next few days because sometimes that just slips my mind for a certain week and then it's like struggling to find a slot with your teachers," Agarwal said.

After numerous adjustments to the schedule, LHS will tentatively adopt this new schedule for the rest of the school year.

LHS Students Participate in the Spanish Exchange Trip

Vedanti Bhargava
Nikhita Prasad
Staff Writers

Over April vacation, a select group of juniors and seniors taking Spanish will go on the Spanish Exchange Trip to expand their knowledge of Spanish language and culture. Thirty students, along with three faculty chaperones, will travel to Spain to experience several day-long excursions to Madrid, Salamanca, Segovia, and Avila.

First launched in Feb. 2020, the Spanish Exchange trip is a relatively new program to Lexington High School.

"It was a lot of fun to bring students abroad, some of them for the first time, and to explore Spanish culture with them," Ryan Casey, a Spanish teacher and chaperone of the trip, said.

The first part of the trip allows students to explore Spain. After Madrid, the group will go to Salamanca, where they will take classes in Spanish.

"Essentially, we're there to learn about and experience Spanish culture in a much more integrated and authentic way than we ever could in the U.S.," Mariyam Simon, a senior participating in the trip, said.

The students have the opportunity to try new food, improve their communication skills, and learn more about Spain. While some are nervous to be speaking with native speakers, most agree that it will be a positive experience.

"[The students] participate in a variety of afternoon activities such as scavenger hunts, an urban art tour, salsa dancing class, cooking class and then also living with host families and you know, eat meals prepared by their host families and kind of get used to daily life in Spain," Casey said.

By immersing themselves in a variety of activities, Casey hopes the students will be able to apply what they have learned in their Spanish classes previously. The students are excited to experience new cultures and expand on the skills they developed.

"We are most excited to fully immerse ourselves in the Spanish way of life and culture, to experience what we've learned about over the years first-hand, and to learn things about Spain we couldn't have in the States," Simon said. "I think the chance to witness for ourselves the nuances of Spanish culture, and learn about their way of life authentically, is truly a memorable and unique experience, much more different than learning about it in a classroom setting."

Notably, COVID-19 is still present, and the students' health assumes top priority. Casey is hopeful that everyone will stay healthy.

"Spain is one of the most highly vaccinated countries and so we feel very confident that we can travel safely and participate safely in activities while taking all the necessary precautions," Casey said.

Despite potential health concerns, students attending the trip are hoping to relax and enjoy the week of cultural exploration.

"I think we're all just looking forward to embracing the opportunities that we do have rather than focusing on the hindrances that COVID could bring. We're truly privileged to be able to go on this trip, and we're all very grateful that we even have this opportunity," Simon said.

Image courtesy of Ryan Casey
Spanish exchange: The 2020 Spanish Exchange in Madrid, Spain

Opinion

Are the Updated School Wi-fi Policies Fair?

Sreenidhi Dharmaraj
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Staff Writers

Last month, a commotion erupted among students at Lexington High School. Some were frantically gripping their phones while attempting to connect to the school's Wi-Fi. Others were already searching for the new passwords. All of this was a result of district-wide network changes.

"The overall goal [of the changes] was to improve cyber security across the district. Oftentimes, networks and the devices that access them are the "points" where breaches occur," Thomas P. Martellone, the Director of Innovation & Instructional Technology at Lexington Public Schools, said.

Although Martellone did not disclose the specific changes to avoid revealing confidential information, the changes include new Wi-Fi passwords and the removal of students' personal devices from the school networks. As a result, many students were shocked to find that their personal devices could no longer connect to the school Wi-Fi network.

"When they first changed it, there was a lot of chaos," Eric Gu, a junior, said.

However, the commotion shortly began to subside. Despite the initial backlash, the network changes have not significantly disrupted student life as school-issued chromebooks can still connect to the school's Wi-Fi.

Because of this, students who did not use personal devices at school were not affected by the network changes.

"I never really used a personal device, so the Wi-Fi change didn't really disrupt anything for me," Shireen Kumar, a junior, said.

Additionally, the changes appear to be effective so far as they strive to create a safer digital environment and better support LHS's goals. The Lexington Public School's 1:1 program allows all students to access a computing device, which LHS fulfills by issuing chromebooks to every student. Unfortunately, the district does not have a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program, because of potential equity concerns.

"The district cannot repair personal devices, and we cannot ensure that all devices will have appropriate virus protection on them. Additionally, monitoring district issued devices is more easily accomplished if need be," Martellone said.

The LPS technology department's website states that a BYOD program could potentially create inequalities between students. Some students may have access to more expensive, faster devices, while others may not.

By incentivizing students to leave their personal devices at home, the network actively challenges these inequities within the student population.

"I haven't brought my personal computer in a long time because of the password change. Trying to get to school early and connect it just seems like a lot more work. And it seems easier to use the school-issued devices." Gu said.

Despite this, there are notable reservations against the new system. Perhaps the most significant drawbacks are the technical limitations of Chromebooks, the difficulties of using cell phones on mobile data, and the need for Wi-Fi for after-school activities.

Students in activities, such as debate, still have access to their own Wi-Fi network only available in the debate room, but many students in other clubs do not.

"I also have a club after school, so I need my personal computer for that," Elaine Zeng, a junior, said. "[The changes] did affect that a little bit because I can't use it anymore."

Though, unfortunately, students cannot use their personal devices as freely in school anymore, the Wi-Fi changes are rational. For one, personal devices are not essential to LHS students, given that the school provides adequate resources to help students learn during the day.

However, the administration could be more lenient with the Wi-Fi policies for clubs and extracurriculars after school.

"They could also have some alternative for people that need to be using the Wi-Fi for after school activities. I think that would be better than just cutting it off," Zeng said.

Lexington Debate Program Shifting In-Person: Was Online Debate a Success?

Anika Basu
Ria Vasishtha
Editors

After nearly two years of hosting and attending online debate tournaments, Lexington High School's debate program is returning to in-person tournaments. As a popular elective amongst students, the debate program is largely known for taking regular trips across the nation, from riding a bus to New Jersey to flying to Kentucky for a tournament.

Although the high school debate circuit took advantage of online sites like Tabroom for tournament registration, round pairings, and results prior to the pandemic, school shutdowns prompted an immediate and full shift to online platforms. The emergence of COVID-19 in early 2020 forced the program to be virtual, so debaters and coaches turned to programs like Zoom, NSDA Campus, and Classrooms.Cloud as the new frontier.

As director of Lexington's debate program, Sheryl Kaczmarek had to adapt to the virtual environment, reallocating funds from the debate budget accordingly.

"[Since] we are not spending money on buses or airline tickets or hotel rooms in the virtual world, there have been twice as many opportunities for students to compete in the virtual world as in the physical world. We can send more people to tournaments—especially in distant locations which we couldn't afford to fly many kids to initially," Kaczmarek said. "Typically, our [tournament] schedule includes between 30 to 32 tournaments. Both last year and this year in the virtual world, our schedule has included 64 to 65."

Kaczmarek also adjusted the curriculum for novice debate classes given the virtual format. As a result of the online environment, the 2021-2022 novice policy class accessed their files online instead of using paper. Although this did not follow tradition, many policy novices preferred the new approach.

"Having your stuff on paper is very hard to organize since you have a bunch of papers around you. It also kills more trees. It's worse for people like me with bad handwriting because you can't see what you are doing," Roger Li, a freshman and first-year policy debater, said.

Beyond the classroom, third and fourth-year debaters saw the shift to a virtual format firsthand, sharing different thoughts about the supposed success of online tournaments.

"[Virtual debate tournaments] are not actually as bad as people say they are because there is a comfortability that comes with being in your own home and being able to go to more tournaments," Vinit Iyer, a junior and third-year policy debater, said.

While some found debating at home convenient, others saw it as an isolating environment for the debate team.

"It's definitely easier in some ways to debate from home because you don't have to worry about that. But you also lose an element of the atmosphere that you're surrounded with—there's more joy if you win in person; you have your teammates there supporting you especially if you're in something like elim[ination round]s," Brett Fortier, a senior and fourth-year Lincoln-Douglas debater, said.

Policy debaters, in particular, struggle with finding local tournaments due to the limited number of active policy teams in New England. The transition online allowed varsity and novice policy teams alike to practice with teams nationally in one-day tournaments like the Online Policy League (OPL) before competing in larger, high-pressure tournaments.

"[OPL] allows kids from Lexington to debate against kids from New York, to debate against kids from Ohio, in a one-day tournament format which is not possible if we had to physically travel. We are the only regularly competing debate team in New England, so giving folks a chance to compete against teams from other places is good," Kaczmarek said.

Though most competitors and coaches agree that online debate can increase the accessibility of debate, others believe that debating online means that "big" schools can easily dominate the circuit. Thus, online debate can prevent smaller debate programs from having the competitive success necessary to justify continuing the activity.

"Every 'big' school now goes to every tournament, so even if you're going to these tournaments as an independent or just a small school debater who's trying to get into it becomes very difficult for you to have the sort of competitive success that leads to you staying in the debate community. That's why the turnover rate and new enrollment rate for debate has been so low… it's a lot harder to build communities and make connections, especially if you're a minority within the debate [community] or if you don't have the school support system," Fortier said.

Kaczmarek echoed this sentiment, explaining that the virtual environment can be inaccessible to students due to the resources required to debate online.

"Not everyone has good computers, good quality WiFi, lives in a home, or has access to a school environment on weekends that is conducive to debates. If you live in an apartment with four to five people, finding a quiet place to sit is really problematic. Having a dedicated computer that they can use for eight or ten hours without having to share with the family is hard," Kaczmarek said.

For the future, several tournaments have turned hybrid, incorporating both virtual and in-person elements. By doing this, tournaments hope to ease the transition in-person, as well as give students and judges the opportunity to compete in their desired environment.

For example, Fortier recently attended the King Round Robin in-person in Texas. With Round Robins being smaller than tournaments, the round-robin was able to succeed in a hybrid tournament, meaning that while most competitors and coaches were in-person, some judges were not.

"For the hybrid rounds, trying to figure out which one of the two in-person debaters should be unmuted on a Zoom call, how to make sure that the judge online always has the ability to be heard, which one of you has your computer volume on—that took a little bit of figuring out how to do. But the overall atmosphere still felt like an in-person tournament," Fortier said.

Fortier believes that hybrid tournaments may be the future of debate, serving as a viable option if not all judges or coaches are present in-person.

"From what I've seen the people who are really worried about in-person tournaments and COVID are the judges and/or coaches of the tournament and less so the kids. I think that the vibe of the tournament and atmosphere of the people they're looking for when they're looking for an in-person tournament is more about seeing other competitors in person than it is for seeing judges," Fortier said. "I don't know what it would be like to have the other competitor be online. I think that it would probably still be preferable to a fully online tournament, but I think that it would still be a lot more online feeling than it would be to have the judge online."

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Removing the Mask Mandate: A Bold Choice

■ Pranav Chivukula
Alex Lau
Staff Writers

On March 9, Lexington unanimously voted to lift the town-wide mask mandate. For Lexington High School, this meant students were no longer required to wear masks indoors during the school day. Overall, the removal of the mask mandate was met with positive feedback from both students and faculty.

The mandate was lifted due to the low COVID-19 case counts, high vaccination rates, and an increase in COVID-19 testing quality. For example, Lexington went from having 888 new cases during the week of Jan. 20 to 54 cases during the week of Mar. 24.

The daily incidence rate per 10,000 people has also decreased every week since the Jan. spike. This, combined with LHS' effective testing system made removing the mask mandate feasible.

Karen Rofu, the Director of Public Health at Lexington Public Schools, collaborated with the Board of Health to make the final decision.

"We can test people, and people can have at-home antigen tests if they want them. We have weekly pooled testing. So we felt there were enough safety-net measures so that we could make it a choice. We called it mask-optional," Rufo said.

Clinics held by the school have also helped boost Lexington's vaccination rates. While other communities' options have been restricted by their low vaccination rates, Lexington has a vaccination rate over 90%. Rufo references this as another reason why going mask-optional made sense for LHS.

The mandate's removal has been met with approval as many students enjoy being able to see their peers and teachers.

"It's cool to see what my teachers look like under their masks," Eli Mishara, a freshman, said.

Rufo also spoke of the social and educational benefits of removing the mask mandate.

"I take it off, and you have a better idea what my social cues are. And I think for speech recognition, the young kids that are trying to learn how to read, it gets easier for them phonetically without a mask," Rufo said.

Removing the mask mandate has also benefited student-athletes greatly. Under the mandate, athletes had to keep their masks on during practice and while competing. Now, they can fully remove their masks.

"The mask mandate lifting is a relief for all, especially for sports," David Zhao, a junior, and member of the LHS Boys Volleyball team, said.

Masks have also been a cause of discomfort for LHS students, and their removal has brought relief for many.

"The mask mandate being lifted has helped me greatly. After school I used to have to put ointment behind my ears because I had very sensitive ears," Calixte Viollet, a sophomore, said.

However, the removal does come with its flaws. LHS' hallways are notorious for being tightly packed with students during passing time. Many may not feel comfortable being in close contact with students not wearing a mask in such a situation.

Rufo acknowledged this, as she also encourages individuals to wear a mask in such areas.

"I do think in certain settings I would advise a mask, such as crowds like the passing time. The LHS hallways, because you are in people's personal space, so in large gatherings, especially indoor gatherings, I would encourage people to wear a mask," Rufo said.

Some students agree, believing wearing a mask is the safer option for them.

"It's cool seeing people's faces again, but I still wear a mask because it's safer," Baoren Liu, a sophomore, said.

Although the change involves some uncertainty and risk, removing the mask mandate has helped LHS move forward. The atmosphere has brightened, with many people feeling much more relaxed now.

At the end of the day, choosing to wear or not wear a mask is a personal decision. However, the removal of the mandate has gone well as many LHS students and staff feel happier.

Lunch at Lexington High School: A New Normal

■ Vivian Wang
Sophia Zhang
Staff Writers

In response to the warmer weather, schedule switch, and gradual return to normalcy, Lexington High School is making changes to the lunch set-up. Long tables have been reintroduced to the Commons for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, and the structure of lunch service is also subject to change. During this time, it is essential to show support for the cafeteria staff and understand the benefits of each change.

In the fall and winter, students eating in the Commons would sit at individual desks set up three feet apart. The long tables give students more space and the opportunity to sit closer together. However, students did not seem to abide by three-feet spacing, even at the time of desks.

"If anything, it might even be better since the tables are lined up whereas the desks would tend to get clumped together. I do think students are aware about spacing, but at this point we've been living with it for so long, we know what precautions to take," Medha Morparia, a junior, said.

Some students have been pleasantly surprised by the return of long tables as it embraces the social atmosphere better, with no noticeable differences in the spread of the virus.

"I really like [the tables]. I eat in the Commons with my friends sometimes, and before they brought back the tables, it was really hard to find enough chairs for everyone. Now, you don't have to look for chairs since the tables have benches. In general, the commons looks a lot more organized and clean now," Morparia said.

While students agree that the long tables bring a new sense of organization to the cafeteria, some are worried that the tables will cause an uncomfortable social and physical transition, especially for those who have never experienced lunch with long tables.

"I have mixed feelings. On one side, I don't really like it because you're all close together, right. It's really squished because there's no walking room in between the tables. And also you can't set individual desks. So if you're alone, you'll seem more alone." Emmy Huang, a sophomore, said.

Despite this, many are grateful for the increasing sense of normalcy within the school.

"Now that they were gone for two years and we've gone through so many different lunch systems, I think the tables really make the commons feel like a regular cafeteria again," Morparia said.

LHS also restored a pre-pandemic feature by reducing the number of lunch blocks to three. As a result, the cafeteria staff is implementing changes in food service to accommodate for the expected influx of students during each lunch period.

Certain food items are planning to be removed as more priority is put on Grab-and-Go options.

"We're doing anywhere from 1300 to 1400 meals a day. That literally means almost 60 to 70 percent of the population in the buildings are eating lunch in four periods. Now we're squishing them into three periods. What we have to do is go 'okay, what are we going to do to make this quicker?'" Kevin Silvia, the food service director for the LPS district, said.

Nevertheless, increasing student numbers at lunchtimes will still make lunch more difficult and chaotic for students and staff alike. Thus, students need to follow the cafeteria guidelines.

Photographer: Olivia Hoover
Students exiting Commons 2 after second lunch

"There's actually two important rules that we have in here. At lunchtime, do not come in the opposite way. Everybody has to come in the same way so we know people are checking out properly. The second thing is students are getting food and waiting for their friends. We want people to get their food and move out because we're trying to keep kids safe," Silvia said.

In addition to following cafeteria protocol, students can also show support for staff by being polite.

"[The cafeteria workers] are people too, and we're all here to help students and ensure they have food here at school," Melissa Steinberg, one of the assistant food service directors for the LPS district, said.

LHS Choral Department's Spring Gala Concert for Peace

Photographer: Olivia Hoover
Spring Gala Choral Concert

■ Alexis Chen
Mrigank Dhingra
Staff Writers

On April 12, the Lexington High School Choral Department hosted a Spring Gala concert. Throughout the concert, choral groups performed pieces centered around the theme of peace amid the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Jason Iannuzzi, the current chorus teacher at LHS, wanted to host an exciting choral project in the spring of this school year.

"Usually, it's a collaboration with the chamber orchestra…this year however, it's nice to have a nice exciting goal to work towards. I was really eager to find something this year that could be a really exciting cherry on top experience for the students who are involved in this program," Iannuzzi said.

The last project the LHS choral department worked on was in the fall of 2019 at the Lexington Symphony. Since the pandemic had drastically altered the concert schedule over the past two years, Iannuzzi wanted to hold a concert that would be realistic given the circumstances.

"We decided to call it a gala concert and bring in a bunch of guest artists who are essentially most of the Lexington Symphony. Rather than doing one big 40-minute work, we decided to do a concert for a bunch of different things with different styles, all around a common theme," Iannuzzi said.

While the concert is centered around the theme of peace, planning for the event had started long before Russia began its invasion of Ukraine.

Aditi Nagaraja, a freshman in Soprano/Alto Chorale, is looking forward to seeing the entire concert come together.

"Each piece is so different, and I am very excited for it because they all relate to peace in some way. The concert itself connects so many people. The Russia and Ukraine war has affected the lives of so many people in our community and around the world. It is a stressful time for many people, and this concert is supposed to let people know that their voice is being heard and that they're not alone," Nagaraja said.

Marina Chen, a senior who is also the Secretary and a Section Leader in Chamber Singers, also expressed her gratitude to the choral department faculty.

"We need more peace and unity within our community, and I truly think music has the power to bring us closer to that. I also want to give a big thank you to Mr. I[anuzzi], Mrs. Larson, Paul [Carlson], and the rest of the music department staff, who have been consistently supporting us performing arts students musically and emotionally. I'm very grateful and blessed for everything they do for the LHS choral program as well as the entire high school music program," Chen said.

Iannuzzi also addressed the need for peace and happiness in our community as students and teachers alike struggle to grasp the heart-wrenching reality of the ongoing conflict.

"A concert for peace is certainly timely, as there's no time, no given day, that somewhere in the world there isn't some kind of a conflict, an armed conflict, so it seemed like a timely conflict. And now, since we're doing this concert for peace with this war context, it's quite poignant," Iannuzzi said.

Artist of the Issue: Jamahl Cruickshank Petit-Frere

■ Lauren Wu
Toshio Yuki
Staff Writers

When Lexington High School senior Jamahl Cruickshank Petit-Frere applied as an extra for the movie The Holdovers, he did not expect to do much more than that. However, after he found out the results, he realized the role he had been assigned was more significant than anticipated.

"[The casting directors] were like, 'Oh, we actually like you for this feature role.' And I ended up interviewing with the director, Payne," Cruickshank Petit-Frere said.

Eventually, Cruickshank Petit-Frere scored the supporting feature role of Curtis Lamb. Filming for the movie started in January, with it being scheduled to release in 2023.

The Holdovers is centered around three characters at a boarding school during the winter of 1970: teacher Paul Hunham, student Angus, and head chef Mary. The movie was filmed in parts of Massachusetts, including Boston and Waltham.

Despite being new to the movie industry, Cruickshank Petit-Frere did not feel very starstruck while amongst the cast.

"I'm not too familiar with [the] actors and directors, so I walked on set, and I was like, I know this is a famous person, but I don't know you at all," Cruickshank Petit-Frere said.

Cruickshank Petit-Frere first found out about the movie from his friend, who had played the role of an extra before.

"He got an email about an opportunity in Boston. And, why not?" Cruickshank Petit-Frere said.

Despite landing a bigger role than expected, Cruickshank Petit-Frere never participated in the audition process—the director picked him from the photos he had sent in his application.

"Once I sent him my pictures for that email, [he] was just going, 'Who do I think would fit this part the best?'" Cruickshank Petit-Frere said. "The way that the director envisioned my character is what I look like."

Cruickshank Petit-Frere worked on the movie from Jan. to early Mar. of 2022, but it didn't take much time outside of school. The most time-consuming commitment came in a somewhat unexpected form.

"I had to look through a lot of baby photos of me because they wanted the younger photos of me. So I had to go through my camera roll, find all of that," Cruickshank Petit-Frere said.

Photographer: Olivia Hoover
Jamahl Cruickshank Petit-Frere, cast member in The Holdovers

Cruickshank Petit-Frere has no plans to continue acting in his future, but he isn't opposed to the idea if it comes naturally.

"I for sure think that if I get another part, if I had a chance to be an extra in a feature movie... I will probably accept it. It was a fun experience, and it is just fun to be on the big screen and have your name out there," Cruickshank Petit-Frere said.

From this acting experience, Cruickshank Petit-Frere gained greater insights on handling new opportunities with a positive mindset.

"I would say that life is going to throw you many opportunities. And [you] gotta take them and see where they take you, because even if it ends up being bad, the experience will make you a better person," Cruickshank Petit-Frere said.

LHS Alum Wins ASCAP Young Jazz Composer Award

■ Medha Jayendran
Nora Kapoor
Staff Writers

On March 14, Kira Daglio-Fine, a Lexington High School alum, won the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers Herb Alpert Young Jazz Composer Award (ASCAP). The award is given annually to accomplished jazz musicians in the early stages of their musical careers.

Daglio-Fine, who graduated in 2014, composed her winning piece, "The Towers,"based on a prompt for a school project.

"We [were tasked with writing] a piece that was based on a painting that we chose. I chose a pointillistic painting," Daglio-Fine said.

Daglio-Fine was first introduced to jazz at a summer camp in middle school, which inspired her to further explore this music genre.

"The summer before eighth grade, I did a Lexplorations jazz camp…that sort of got me into [jazz]. And then I started doing it a lot in high school. And it kind of just took off from there," Daglio-Fine said.

After being unhappy with her middle school band program, Daglio-Fine decided to attend the jazz camp before deciding whether to give up on music entirely.

"The reason I did the jazz camp in the first place was because I was very upset with the band situation in middle school," Daglio-Fine said. "I was ready to give up on music. And then my parents were like, 'hey, why don't you try one more thing before you give up.'"

Daglio-Fine believes that LHS's jazz program, along with the program's supportive staff, played a big role in choosing to continue her jazz journey.

"The jazz program at LHS is phenomenal. And I think that inspired me to keep going," Daglio-Fine said.

Daglio-Fine also credited Justin Aramati, an LHS band teacher, as an important mentor.

"When I was starting out, Mr. Aramati was a big influence," Daglio-Fine said. "He encouraged me to get out there in terms of taking solos and trying out for more opportunities."

Looking back at her music experience at LHS, Daglio-Fine recommends other aspiring jazz musicians to always take advantage of new opportunities and keep pursuing their goals.

"Take all the opportunities that you can. A lot of the transformative experiences for me were things that I took it upon myself to do," Daglio-Fine said.

Athlete of the Issue: Andreas Padilla Selected for U20 Frisbee Tryout

Avni Kamat
Editor-in-Chief

Andreas Padilla, a senior at Lexington High School, was selected to try out to represent the United States at the 2022 World Junior Ultimate Championships in Wroclaw, Poland.

Upon the completion of a rigorous application process, 200 ultimate frisbee players under the age of 20 were invited from a national pool of elite college and high school athletes to attend the tryouts in Florida and California, Padilla being one of them. While eventually choosing to decline the invitation, Padilla weighed numerous factors, both personal and financial, in his decision.

Padilla's ultimate frisbee journey began early when he developed an interest in the sport in elementary school.

"My brother had just started playing in high school with the Fooligans, and he needed someone to throw with. He would make me throw with him for hours on end and watch frisbee videos with him once we were done," Padilla said.

Following in his brother's footsteps, as a freshman, Padilla began playing for the Fooligans, LHS's Boys Varsity Ultimate team, competing in various tournaments.

"Playing on the LHS Boys Ultimate Frisbee team has always been really fun for me. I started my freshman year and had so many people on the team to look up to and learn from," Padilla said.

After having consecutive seasons interrupted by the pandemic, Padilla helped the Fooligans emerge victorious in the 2021 Coconut Classic tournament in New Jersey this past fall. Despite having applied once prior on a whim, his successful performance at the tournament prompted Padilla to reapply for the U-20 tryout as a senior.

In his application, Padilla outlined his ultimate frisbee playing experience and submitted two coach recommendation letters, one from Larry David, coach for the LHS Fooligans.

"He's extraordinarily talented. He has things you can't teach, such as height and speed. He also has very good decision-making and a really good head for the game. I think he'd be an asset. He'd do a great job representing us in an international competition," David said.

After a month's wait, Padilla was notified of his selection in Dec. 2021.

"When I got the email saying that I was selected to try out for the national team, I was very surprised. I had sort of forgotten that I applied because I was so focused on the track season that would be starting soon. I was flattered because only 200 people in the country were chosen for this tryout, yet somehow it felt like a choice I had to make," Padilla said.

Although Padilla recognized the honor of being selected and possibly joining Team USA at the Junior World Championships, the final decision of whether to participate rested on multiple factors.

"I knew that many people would take this tryout without a second thought, but I didn't know if it was the right choice for me," Padilla said.

With the East Coast tryout being held in Florida and the championships themselves being slated for the Dominican Republic at the time, travel and boarding expenses posed a financial consideration.

"To go to the tryout in Florida is a very expensive trip, and if you make the team, it costs more to get to the World Championship in the Dominican Republic. It's a huge financial commitment as well as a physical one," Padilla said.

Additionally, Padilla reflected on his uncertainty surrounding ultimate frisbee being a part of his future.

Photo Courtesy of UltiPhotos
Student Athlete, Andreas Padilla

"The Ultimate world does not have much of a professional league. I love playing frisbee, but at the same time, there's not much of a future in it, and I don't know if I'm going to play frisbee in college. Committing to the tryout would require a lot of preparation, and there were other commitments that I wanted to stay dedicated to, like the track team," Padilla said.

In hindsight, Padilla reflected positively on his choice.

"While the experience would be an incredible one, I wanted to focus on different things and really make the most of my senior year," Padilla said.

Lexington High School Indoor Track All-Americans

Berta Casanova Ferrer
Ishaan Tiperneni
Staff Writers

In early March, selected Lexington High School track runners competed at the Nike Indoor Nationals in New York. Runners Evan Eberle, Oliver DiCerbo, Glenn Burcsu, and Max Zhang became All-Americans, a distinction earned for top six places in the Championship, from performances in the 4x800m relay.

At the start of the season, the athletes did not expect to achieve such successful results.

"We did not even think we would be going to New Englands. We thought our season would be over after the state meet but luckily, we qualified," Burcsu, a sophomore, said.

This was especially true for Zhang, a freshman who received a spot on the team after other runners couldn't make it.

"I was lucky to get the spot to run in our relay. There were a lot of people that were injured throughout the season and couldn't run. The spot eventually came to me, and I'm really thankful for that," Zhang said.

After the team was finalized, the athletes formed close-knit relationships that greatly contributed to their success.

"We trained together, and a couple times before a meet, we would go to dinner together. We spent a whole dinner just talking and got some ice cream afterwards, and it was just a nice experience," Zhang said.

Additionally, the coaches' dedication to the team contributed to much of the team's accomplishments.

"The coaches made the whole plan of workouts and what to do to get ready for the nationals meet. For example, we started running lower mileage so that our legs felt less tired for our last meet. We also did a workout two days before which was a 2x400, 2x200 to get some speed in our legs. The coaches prepared us phenomenally to get us in peak shape for the meet," Burcsu said.

Zhang expressed his gratitude to Eberle and DiCerbo, both seniors on the team, for helping him at the beginning of his track career.

"They just provided a lot of guidance and an example. They've been doing it for so long, and it's good to have someone to look up to. Especially this being my first season, everything was brand new to me and I feel like I've gotten used to it all," Zhang said.

Earning the All-American title has pushed the team to continue working hard for future seasons. Burcsu and Zhang are looking to repeat their success next year.

"I think it's a great confidence boost, and I know my abilities now. It motivates me to keep moving forward," Zhang said.

Check out our instagram: @lexmusket

Bicycle Advisory Committee Efforts to Increase Bikers

■ Elias Tamer
Neo Chatterjee
Staff Writers

On March 14, all Lexington High School students received an email to complete a survey created by the Lexington Bicycle Advisory Committee, which oversees bicycle routes and policies in Lexington and neighboring towns. The committee's survey aimed to collect thoughts and concerns of Lexington's student biking population.

"We want to understand what the challenges are for students to get to school," Betty Gau, chair of the Bicycle Advisory Committee, said.

In line with this objective, the Committee appointed sophomore Arnav Arora to be its first LHS student liaison last fall.

"I give a student perspective on what's going on with biking in school and around town," Arora said. "A lot of the committee is out of touch with the younger generation, so I heard that they were looking for someone to give a younger eye".

The purpose of the Bicycle Advisory Committee is to advise the Select Committee of the Town of Lexington on matters pertaining to biking.

"This past fall, we advised the Select Board that the town really needs a bicycle pedestrian plan… And now the town has put a bicycle and pedestrian plan in its budget, and the budget is being reviewed by all the committees now," Gau said.

A primary goal of the Bicycle Advisory Committee has been to increase the number of bikers in Lexington to reduce the town's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions.

"Biking is a form of exercise, and any form of that is really good," Arora said. "You're not producing any emissions, and it's less cars on the road, and that's just great for everybody."

Biking also provides an eco-friendly alternative to traveling to school by car.

"It's really crowded and congested, so more kids that are riding and coming to school would benefit everybody in that sense," Andrew Stephens, LHS principal, said.

The survey received many responses, especially from longtime bikers.

"This is how they get to school, this is something that impacts them, and it's therefore important to them," Arora said.

Safety was one of the primary issues brought up in responses to the survey.

"We did get a lot of responses regarding safety and what can be done to increase confidence and get [bikers] on their bikes more often," Arora said.

Ensuring biker safety is one of the primary goals of the committee, which has designated bike lanes around town.

"We need more bike lanes. We need designated and protected ways for bicyclists to ride around town…There are no protected bike lanes from the Minuteman bike path to the schools, like to LHS," Gau said.

Despite efforts by the Bicycle Advisory Committee and LHS to increase the number of bikers, it is ultimately up to the students to decide to ride their bike.

"My power is to say, 'please consider biking to LHS', because at the end of the day, the real power is really with the student and their caregiver, in terms of determining whether or not that student is going to ride the bike," Stephens said.

Arora echoed this sentiment, and encouraged his peers to bike to school.

"Get on your bikes. It's getting warmer, there are no excuses really," Arora said.

Features

DEI Student Advisory Council Children's Literacy Project

■ Anagha Chakravarti
Disha Sankholkar
Staff Writers

The Children's Literacy Project is an initiative created by Lexington High School students to focus on highlighting marginalized identities in literature. The program started as a measure to introduce new perspectives and reflect the diversity of the Lexington Public Schools' student body within the literature curriculum. As students have advocated for more representation in their literature classes, LPS has begun to take action.

In high school, seniors now have the option to take new literature electives focusing on marginalized groups, which hope to widen students' insight into diverse backgrounds. Some of these classes include African American Literature, Journeys in East Asian Literature, and the Heroine's Journey: Women in Literature.

The Children's Literacy Project originally began as a way to expose elementary school children to different groups and identities and broaden their perspective on the world. Nidhi Inamdar, a freshman and one of the student leaders of this initiative, says that project members are planning to start the initiative within LPS, which would eventually spread to other towns in the area.

"We have many different places that we want this to go, and the main goal of this all would be to diversify children's literature and make sure that everyone sees themselves in literature," Inamdar said.

The ultimate goal of the project is to ensure that young children have access to books that follow characters with a wide range of backgrounds.

Whether this means having physical copies of the books in their classrooms or sharing audiobooks and PDFs of the books, the project is determined to make sure children are able to read the texts.

Additionally, many of the students involved in the project resonate with its goals and hope to help young students feel more represented and heard in their community. Medha Jayendran, a freshman who is a part of the project, believes the initiative will allow students to relate to the characters they read about on a cultural level.

"I think when I was a kid, not having many books [that] I could see myself in… played a big role in why we're doing this, because we don't want other younger children to have the same experience where we don't see ourselves [in books], because it kind of alters our perception of the world," Jayendran said.

Although the project is still in its preliminary phases, members have created a website and distributed feedback forms to collect input from the LHS community and better choose books that reflect the student body.

Ultimately, the Children's Literature Project hopes to allow students to feel like they are important and create a sense of belonging, which is one of the core tenets of the LPS community.

A New "Welcome" Display

Photographer: Olivia Hoover
"Welcome" Display

■ Sahana Behera
Isabella Schulte
Staff Writers

Recently in Lexington High School's Main Building, school counselor Stephanie Michael created the "Welcome" display to promote inclusion and represent the diversity in the LHS community.

The display, located on a window by the Quad, features an arrangement of flags from the countries that represent LHS students' diverse backgrounds. Due to its visible placement, many students and staff can admire the display during passing times.

"[The location of the display is] actually the perfect place. When you're walking by, just going downstairs, trying to get to your class, and you get a glimpse of [the display], and there are flags all over the window, " Deniz Dokmecioglu, a sophomore, said.

Many students have appreciated the powerful message behind the arrangement: as every individual at LHS comes from a unique array of backgrounds.

"It kind of reminds me of how many places there are in the world and how many types of people we have at LHS that makes it so diverse and welcoming," Dokmecioglu said.

Many have found the "Welcome" display to transform the atmosphere within LHS, serving as a representation of the diversity at LHS and ideally allowing students and staff to feel more accepted.

"This school is so diverse, and I think having all these flags makes everyone feel seen… It's so important for students to feel seen," Francisco Hernandez Salgado, a school counselor, said.

Students believe more representation, even as simple as a flag display, is a step in the right direction for LHS.

"It makes me feel really fortunate to be in a place where everyone is included and there's positivity. Everyone's culture is not only welcome, but it is appreciated," Dokmecioglu said.

Not only has this display created a more positive atmosphere, but it also allows some to feel like they have a place at LHS despite differences in racial and ethnic backgrounds.

"I think when people walk by and they see their flag, it might make them feel like this might also be their home, if all their culture and what they know is welcome at LHS itself," Dokmecioglu said.

CollegeBored: The Wait is Over

■ Alex Tang
Columns Editor

Finally. It's done. College apps—the seemingly interminable source of stress—are over. For this issue, I write about something quite helpful in getting time to speed up and try to reflect on what all this means.

When I was younger, I was confined to the classical music genre. Bach, Beethoven, Bruch. I valued music, practicing an hour every day and trying not to get embarrassed every Sunday in front of my teacher. Soon, I formed a "plugged-in" mindset with music. I listened to music to succeed in a lesson, an audition, or a recital.

Now, you're probably thinking, how does music remotely relate to college? Well, as I awaited my decisions, I began listening to other genres of music. Soon, I developed a habit of listening to one song for a week, then finding something new. Thanks to YouTube algorithms, I now have a time capsule. Allow me to digress.

I was reading a blog about how someone used painting as a form of external memory. It all made sense to me: music had become an extension of my memory. Each song I listen to represents a discrete piece of time: when I listen to one of those songs today, it offers me a window into the past. That's the power of music. A three-minute song can conjure up so many complex emotions, from elation to fear. Those emotions boiled together into a disorienting and jarring three minutes and transported me away from the grind of school and decisions. This is how I made the wait bearable.

We've been "plugged in" for a while. So unplug. Try something new. After that, return to the old. After my music sojourn with jazz, rap, and other genres, I came back to classical music. Though those melodies were familiar, they were timeless. Listening to music helped me find myself during this time.

They say that applying to college is an opportunity for self-discovery, distilling the essence of yourself into 650 words and some supplements. I'll say that it's not necessarily writing the essays, summarizing those extracurriculars in the Common App, or presenting yourself in the interview. It's the experience. It's those crazy emotions that you experience: the uncertainty, the closure, the worry, the relief, the sadness, the joy. That is the essence of self-discovery.

So I guess that's it. Thanks for sticking along for the ride.

The Intramural Volleyball Tournament Sheds Light on School Spirit

■ Austin Li
Columnist

After months of planning and organizing, hundreds of students gathered in the gym from March 14 to 16 to participate in a school-wide volleyball tournament. Two years ago, the Lexington Boys Volleyball team's intramural tournament was cut short when school shut down due to COVID-19. In 2021, strict restrictions entailed canceling the event altogether. The annual tournament was not only a widely anticipated event amongst the student body, but also one that would bring students together in a crowded, sweaty gym.

As students began to form teams, finding commonalities in classes, sports, and even jobs (as the champion team, "Notorious R.I.B" did), allowed the excitement to brew. Teams were primarily composed of seniors, seeking their moment of glory after losing out on two years. This fueled an energetic atmosphere during the games—the noise of students cheering was so loud that I could barely hear myself speaking to my team. It sparked a whirlwind of emotions, from excitement to joy to sadness; it finally felt like school had returned to a somewhat "normal" state and for the first time in years, I saw a united and spirited student body.

In the past, the school has attempted to unite students in engaging activities. I remember watching the 10th grade pep-rally, standing in a large crowd peering over the upperclassmen in front of me trying to figure out what the commotion was in the middle of the fieldhouse. Or "Spirit days," which aren't known by most until they arrive at the school that day and see their pajama-clad classmates. Or the school's famed Advisory, bringing students in to talk about sensitive issues right after getting to know each other with "Two Truths and a Lie."

LHS has certainly tried to engage students in a spirit beyond the "work hard" culture. However, there has always been a consistent lack of unity. Since I entered LHS, the idea of having a "school spirit" was never popular amongst friend groups. When the focus was on the physics test next block, no one cared about wearing 90's rock band clothes or even knowing the names of everyone in their class. If students don't think their friends are going to participate in an activity, or even worse, think of that activity as "cringe," they will rarely exit their comfort zone to participate as well. The consequence is that LHS will never be thought of as a place beyond students taking difficult classes and receiving grades.

So, we can see the problem: not many students think of school spirit as a fun activity, but rather as awkward and force. How is it possible to fix this?

The reason I bring up the intramural volleyball tournament at the beginning is that it's an event that has worked: students were massively excited while playing and watching others play. In the later rounds of the tournament, crowds formed around the courts, yelling and cheering after each long point. The biggest difference between this event and normal events held by the school is commitment.

From the beginning, the event was advertised widely—motivating seniors to take their last chance to join after they lost two years of a fun activity and pushing underclassmen to try playing volleyball. A Facebook group was created with updates before the tournament even started. I know firsthand that the volleyball team talked about it non-stop to create as much excitement as possible and introduce more students to the sport.

However, with school activities, we rarely see any of these happening. Thus, for these events to work, there must be a certain degree of commitment to creating an activity that is truly interesting. Half organizing and half advertising won't work. Yes, this means a larger time commitment for the school. Yes, this means more time is taken from classes for in-school events. But there is no world where everything can fit in. If LHS truly wants to form a strong spirit that could aid the health of the school as a whole, they must put more time and dedication into the events they organize. I know there are already students and staff making this commitment, which I applaud—this also means that the obligation lies not only in the staff but also in the students to grow this school beyond classes and foster a positive and joyful environment.

Examining the Health Curriculum at LHS

■ Tasneem Ghadiali
Diversity Columnist

Health education is an often overlooked component of an adolescent's education. The mental health crisis facing teenagers in America has been coined the 'second pandemic.' According to a 2021 study conducted by the University of Michigan, one in three teen girls and one in five teen boys have experienced new or worsening anxiety since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last year, I took Adolescent Health Issues I, a required course for freshmen. While I found the curriculum extremely valuable and relevant to Lexington High School students, I noted some potential changes to the health curriculum that could create a more beneficial and comfortable health class experience.

During the class, we talked about various issues including drug use, mental health, and relationships. Although this is all necessary information, it seemed very similar to the lessons covered in Advisory. For example, we did the same activity on creating our personal 'identity wheels' in both health and Advisory. Perhaps creating different or more nuanced lesson plans for each class would increase engagement among students.

Additionally, the pandemic and virtual setting made it difficult to create a sense of community among students, which made it more uncomfortable to discuss challenging topics within groups. Many students seemed more uncomfortable with their peers, who they could only see through Zoom. Therefore, to make students feel more comfortable, virtual discussions could have been made optional, while more independent study lessons and the option for students to choose their own discussion groups could be implemented.

Lastly, there was a strong emphasis on participation in the Health rubric. In a "half hybrid-half remote" schooling environment, I noticed many students who did not feel comfortable talking about specific topics and thus, may have been marked down for not "participating" in class. Those students would then have to explain their low participation to their health teacher, making the situation even more stress-inducing. If the health rubric allowed for more independent study, or considered participation in ways beyond simply vocal participation, students' grades may be more reflective of their effort.

My brother is in elementary school, where they are introduced to basic health principles. He looks forward to every class and comes home excitedly talking about the "wellness wheel." While the health curriculum seems to be working at engaging elementary students, it is less effective for high school students. In general, not many high schoolers talk about how much they love health to their friends. Underlying reasons may be that students find the activities in health class less interesting than activities in other classes, or they do not give as much importance to the class.

To improve the effectiveness of health classes, health teachers could give students more independence and structure the class as a self-study course. Teachers could also provide access to the presentations and videos for students to watch if they want more information. I would love it if the class gave more nuanced solutions to the struggles of Lexington students, including mental health issues, time management, and social pressure. Considering how the pandemic has amplified the emotional health needs of students, LHS should tailor the curriculum to meet these needs.

Human Writes: Relief Efforts in Ukraine

■ Talia Alperin
Human Rights Columnist

Russia. Ukraine. Putin. Zelensky. War. Catastrophe. For over a month, these words have been flooding news headlines— and for a good reason, too. The war in Ukraine marks the first invasion of a European country by a foreign nation since the Nazis' invasion of Poland at the start of World War II.

As of now, the war has forced 3.6 million people to flee Ukraine, displaced more than half of Ukraine's 7.4 million children, and cut off the supply of safe water for millions of people. Amidst the war, civilians and critical facilities like hospitals and schools have been targeted.

I want to take the time and space to honor the Lexington High School students who have worked to assist the people of Ukraine. Within a few weeks of the invasion, LHS students held fundraisers and bake sales, and hosted donation drives that collected boxes of goods to support Ukrainian refugees. Additionally, the LHS Counseling Office is hosting Community Conversations during lunch periods in Room 144 once a cycle. During these conversations, students discuss pressing issues such as the communities being impacted by the invasion of Ukraine. All students are encouraged to participate in these conversations.

Now, I want to address the whole LHS community. Organizations around the world are responding to the invasion and they require your support. UNICEF, well known for its life-saving work, is on the ground providing essential care to displaced children. UNICEF has provided innumerable support to the people of Ukraine through hygiene kits, sanitary supplies, clean water, education, and even child protection teams to help children in danger. UNICEF is different from other organizations because they offer unique services, such as Blue Dot Hubs, safe spaces for women and children fleeing conflicts. At Blue Dot Hubs, refugees seek information, support, protection and for children, a healthy environment where they can be relieved of trauma and violence. These hubs even work to reunite children with their families and provide professional mental health support to children.

Save the Children is well-known for its humanitarian work with children. In the past, they have been a part of the effort to lower malnutrition and mortality rates among children. Families in Ukraine and other war zones lack the basic necessities for survival. Their lives have been violently upended, and war has brutally torqued their childrens' mental health. Save the Children is now responding directly to the crisis in Ukraine, and are addressing families' needs by providing them with the resources and psychological health services. As a whole, they have worked tirelessly to support the physical and psychological needs of children in conflict zones, like Ukraine. Please consider supporting their relief efforts in Ukraine or donating to another organization. Every cent counts.

History has taught us not to try to appease heinous criminals like Putin. We learned this lesson during the terrifying years leading up to World War II. In September of 1938, Hitler demanded that the then-prime-minister of Great Britain, Neville Chamberlain, cede the Sudetenland - a part of Czechoslovakia - to Germany. Chamberlain immediately acquiesced, making his famously empty promise for "peace for our times." World War II broke out a year later.

We must not make the same mistake. The way to end Russia's assault on Ukraine is to put political pressure on Russia. Utilize your social media to stand against Russia's invasion of Ukraine and support efforts to help the people in Ukraine. Show your solidarity with Ukraine by sharing this post from the International Rescue Committee. Any pressure that we can put on Russia is critical in the fight against autocrats like Putin, who has the malevolence not only to oppress his own people, but to violate the sovereignty of a free nation.

Maybe you want to tune out of the news for a bit, and that's okay. News can be overwhelming. But for others, your best option may be to channel that energy away from your emotions and direct it towards supporting humanitarian efforts in Ukraine. Now is the time for unity. Let's take action.

Spider-Man: No Way Home (Spoilers Discussed)

■ Pavan Cheruku
Movies Columnist

You're in free fall. Your chest feels like it's sinking— like every towering tree of the Amazon Rainforest is propelling through your thoracic cavity at once. Your eyelids are glued tightly to your corneas like sticky pages of an ancient manuscript. The overwhelming sound of the wind shooting up your spandex suit is deafening. At the very last conceivable moment, you extend your right arm ahead of you and shoot a web that implants itself onto a ledge of the Chrysler building. Your legs project above your head, carving out an exhilarating path for you to swing above the perpetual chaos of New York City traffic.

I absolutely love Spider-Man. I grew up watching Sam Raimi's iconic Spider-Man trilogy with Tobey Maguire, Marc Webb's duology with Andrew Garfield, the Spectacular Spider-Man animated series, and reading the comics. Anytime I felt unsure of myself, I would imagine myself swinging past skyscrapers at lightning speed and immediately feel reassured. You can find a drawing of Spider-Man on any piece of paper I receive from school: on the back of a circular motion worksheet from Physics class, or next to a short story I'm reading in Spanish class. So obviously, I could not wait to watch Spider-Man: No Way Home.

Spider-Man: No Way Home was directed by Jon Watts, and is the third Spider-Man film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. This film takes place directly after the events of Spider-Man: Far From Home, where Mysterio reveals that Spider-Man is Peter Parker and frames him for murder. Peter's life begins to fall apart once his identity is revealed. He's overwhelmed by incessant character assassination from J. Jonah Jameson and The Daily Bugle and is especially upset that he and his friends are rejected from their dream college MIT due to backlash over Peter's alter ego. As a senior who just finished applying to colleges, I thought it was relatable to see the struggles of the college admissions process depicted as an obstacle Peter and his friends have to face. To fix the situation he has found himself in, Peter solicits the help of Dr. Strange, who proposes casting a spell that would make everyone forget that he is Spider-Man. Peter ends up tampering with the spell while Dr. Strange is casting it since he wants his loved ones to remember his secret identity. The movie's central conflict arises when the corrupted spell begins summoning villains from alternate universes who know that Peter is Spider-Man.

There is so much to talk about with this movie. Plot-wise, countless surprises made the story captivating from start to finish. I loved the Daredevil cameo at the beginning of the movie, and I'd love to see Charlie Cox reprise his role from the gritty Netflix Original Series in MCU films down the line. Furthermore, Aunt May's tragic death made me tear up. I loved how she served as Peter's moral compass in the films and that we will see her live on through his heroism. The reveal of Tobey Maguire and Andrew Garfield in this movie made me euphoric. I had been wanting to see all three depictions of the character share scenes together in a movie for years. I've seen the movie three times already but hearing the crowd react to the scenes with Maguire, Garfield, and Holland together never gets old.

Beyond just presenting fan service, I think the writers of the movie did an excellent job of crafting a story that captures the essence of Spider-Man. Spider-Man: No Way Home expresses the idea that "with great power comes great responsibility" by making Peter rehabilitate the villains from alternate dimensions rather than following the easy path and sending them back to their universes to die. This decision makes Peter grapple with genuine sacrifices, a recurring struggle for every version of Spider-Man. He makes the heartbreaking decision not to pursue MJ and Ned after the final forgetting spell takes effect because he believes they are safer and happier without him. What's more responsible than choosing to have all of your loved ones forget about you to save the universe?

The acting in this movie also deserves recognition. Tom Holland provides the best performance of his career in Spider-Man: No Way Home. Holland flawlessly portrays Peter's grief and anger after Aunt May's death. In this movie, Peter changes from an immature, carefree kid to a far more world-weary and darker Spider-Man, which Holland expresses masterfully. Garfield and Maguire were also excellent in this film, and I'm glad they had enough screen time to conclude their character arcs. I loved that Garfield's Spider-Man could save MJ, and gain redemption for not saving Gwen Stacy, which he blamed himself for. Willem Dafoe was also phenomenal, playing both the personalities of Norman Osborn—the vulnerable, senile part of him— and the menacing Green Goblin. The Green Goblin has become my favorite Spider-Man villain because of Dafoe's acting in this movie. I loved Zendaya's depiction of MJ and thought this movie did a great job of developing her relationship with Peter. However, this made their final scene together even more tragic.

The ending of the movie was absolutely perfect. It brings Spider-Man back to being a more grounded superhero, who is alone and broke, and just trying his best to be a good person. I'm excited to see where the MCU will take this iconic character from here.

However, Spider-Man: No Way Home wasn't flawless. I found the first act of the film to be formulaic and bland in its filmmaking and thought some of the motivations of the villains in the movie didn't really make sense. Still, I thought it was a close-to-perfect Spider-Man film, and probably one of the most entertaining cinema experiences I've ever had. If Spider-Man: No Way Home were a song, it would be 10 Mile Stereo by Beach House: surreal, entertaining, and climactic.